assessed to be ranging between 10 to 30% of crop production, depending on the factors indicated above.

(b) Government has adopted Integrated Pest Management (IPM) as the cardinal principle of plant protection. Central Integrated Pest Management Centers have been established across the country to, *inter-alia,* undertake pest surveillance and provide advisories to the State Governments on pest management, impart training to farmers in IPM by organizing Farmers Field Schools, encourage use of biological means of pest management, etc. The package of practices of IPM for major crops have been developed and circulated to all States and the Union Territories. These packages have also been made available on the web site of Department of Agriculture and Cooperation for the use of extension fuctionaries and farmers.

(c) The Government is promoting judicious use of pesticides through its policy of Integrated Pest Management (IPM). The Registration Committee, constituted under Section 5 of the Insecticides Act, registers pesticides after being satisfied of their efficacy and safety. The Registration Committee has framed simplified guidelines for the registration of pesticides especially in respect of bio-pesticides. The quality assurance of pesticides is ensured through regular drawal and analysis of pesticide samples through a network of Pesticide Testing Laboratories. The Central Government provides assistance to State Governments for establishing and strengthening Pesticide Testing Laboratories. The State Governments have been advised to enforce the provisions of the Insecticides Act in order to prevent sale of spurious pesticides. The availability of the insecticides is reviewed with the States before Kharif and Rabi every year in the Zonal Conferences.

(d) It has been assessd that 39773 MT of Technical grade pesticide has been used during 2005-06. Based on gross cropped area, per hectare use of pesticides comes to 208 g.

Prices of essential items

*63. SHRI TARIQ ANWAR:
SHRI JAI PARKASH AGGARWAL:

Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that cost of foodgrains is increasing day by day

and Government are not able to control even the prices of the essential items; and

(b) if so, the steps Government are taking to keep a check on atleast the prices of essential items?

THE MINISTER OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI SHARAD PAWAR): (a) Prices of foodgrains, especially of wheat and pulses had registered increase during the current financial year. Government has taken a number of measures to contain the prices of essential commodities, as a result of which, the prices of wheat and gram dal have largely shown a steady to declining trend since the last three months. Prices of sugar started declining from the middle of November 2006 at different centres in the country.

(b) Government has taken various measures to contain prices of essential commodities. Some of the more important measures are as under:

(i) Reduction in retail prices of petrol by Rs. 2 per litre and diesel by Re. 1 per litre in November 2006 and again in February 2007.

(ii) State Trading Corporation contracted for import of 55 lakh tonnes of wheat to supplement domestic availability, of which 52.41 lakh tonnes have arrived by February 23,2007.

(iii) As against normal applicable duty of 50 per cent, private trade has been allowed to import wheat at 5 per cent duty from June 28, 2006, and at zero duty from September 9, 2006.

(iv) Decision to release up to 4 lakh tonnes of wheat under Open Market Sale Scheme in February and March 2007.

(v) Ban on export of wheat from February 9, 2007.

(vi) Reduction in customs duty on import of pulses to zero on June 8,2006.

(vii) Ban on export of pulses with effect from June 22, 2006.

(viii) National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Limited imported 49,300 tonnes of pulses. Under a new contract executed by NAFED in December 2006 to import 30,000 tonnes

of pulses, 11,189 tonnes have been shipped by February 20,2007.

(ix) In order to contain volatility in the futures prices of wheat, sugar and pulses, Forward Markets Commission (FMC) has imposed limits on open position, reduced limits on daily fluctuations and imposed additional/special margins.

(x) Reduction in import duty on palm group of oils by 10 percentage points in August 2006 and by a further 10-12.5 percentage points in January 2007. Maintaining tariff value for assessing import duty unchanged at July 2006 level.

(xi) Ban on export of skimmed milk powder.

(xii) Steps were taken by Reserve Bank of India to reduce liquidity in the system by increasing the cash reserve ratio and repo rates.

(xiii) Keeping in view the prevailing price situation, the Central Government had issued a Central Order dated 29.08.2006 under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 to enable the State Governments to invoke Stock Limits in respect of wheat and pulses for a priod of 6 months. By virtue of this Order, the State Governments/UT Administrations have been empowered to take effective action to bring out the hoarded stock of these items to ensure their availability to the common people at reasonable prices. Government has also decided to extend the validity of the Central order by another six months.

Privatisation of catering services

†*64. SHRI LALIT KISHORE CHATURVEDI: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the catering services in Railways have been entrusted to private sector;

(b) whether this system of privatisation would be able to provide qualitative catering to common man at a reasonable price;

(c) whether small trolley men, vendors and shopkeepers would be deprived of their business in the name of cleanliness and sanitation; and

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.